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## Hegemonic at home and subaltern abroad

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Title: Hegemonic at Home and Subaltern Abroad; Kamaiya Masculinities and Changing Mobility in  
Nepal

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## Introduction

Mobility and masculinity in South Asia have been examined in Nepal (Sharma 2007a; Sharma 2007b), South India (Osella and Osella 2000, 2006; Osella and Gardner 2004), North India (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2005; Jeffrey 2010; McDuie-Ra 2011) and Pakistan (Charsley 2005). These studies cumulatively find that mobility and migration are important aspects of masculinity in the region. In this article I focus on changing patterns of migration and movement for a specific group of subaltern men from the Kamaiya ethnic group, located in far-west Nepal.<sup>i</sup> This article responds to the call by a number of scholars to examine subaltern masculinities, particularly among migrant men (cf. Montes 2013; Thai 2008).

[Figure 1 to be entered here]

As former bonded labourers (or slaves) the Kamaiya have a specific history of marginalization, poverty and limited mobility due to the constraints inherent in the Kamaiya system (a system of bonded labour officially banned in 2000). The system dictated that Kamaiya were not free to move when and where they liked, with punishments reported if they did. This article presents a new perspective on how mobility is becoming an important part of masculinity in Kamaiya communities. To do this I consider the account of movement I acquired over a series of interviews with a Kamaiya man Ram. As I consider in more detail below, Ram moved from Nepal to India for variable lengths of time, complementing Jan Breman's (1996) research examining the circulation of labour in India.

Following the abolishment of the Kamaiya system of bonded labour (Cheria 2005; Giri 2009; Maycock 2012; Rankin 1999), certain types of mobility have become closely associated with the

performance of particular masculinities and stages in the male life course. This article considers how Kamaiya men are adopting mainstream pathways to becoming adults that have existed in other Nepalese communities for many years (Hausner 2007; Sharma 2007b; 2007a). In doing so Kamaiya men are performing masculinities that are subaltern while abroad, while conversely these same masculinities are hegemonic at home. Furthermore, increasing levels of Kamaiya mobility illustrate an acceptance of broader, more mainstream currents of masculinity and modernity that prevail in rural Nepal; this is relevant not only for the men who move but also for the villages to which they return.

In this article, I examine how new forms of work produce forms of mobility that are changing Kamaiya masculinities as well as the consequences of these emergent masculinities for rural Kamaiya communities. I focus on the ways in which mobility is one way of achieving certain types of work, which confers a masculine advantage for those who are able to be mobile i.e. certain men. Furthermore, I consider the ways in which movement is an important component of modernity (Appadurai 1996). Mobility is a critical way in which new masculine performances and positions become possible for Kamaiya men. Such changes are a consequence of newly accessible spaces that lead to ‘emergent masculinities’ (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011) within the Kamaiya community. Following Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) and Chopra et al’s (2004), ethnographic approaches to masculinity, this article unpacks and illuminates the implications of movement on masculinity, from the understanding that masculinities are multiple (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In doing so, it explores how Kamaiya masculinities are composed and performed. Connell (2005) developed the notion of hegemonic masculinity to give an account of how certain (hegemonic) forms of masculinity predominate over others in specific places and times. This has become the preeminent way of theorizing relationships between multiple masculinities.

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3 Ultimately, this article considers the ways in which Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is  
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5 useful in the analysis of the material that follows: consistently in the material presented I consider  
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7 how subaltern Kamaiya masculinities respond to, at times reject and at other times appropriate  
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9 hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities, both home and abroad. In contrast to my arguments,  
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11 Wetherell and Edley (1999) indicate that in many local settings, being a man may actually be  
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13 configured around performances of masculinity that find coherence in being quite distant from  
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15 local manifestations of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>ii</sup> Such responses do not necessarily change the  
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17 hegemonic position of certain masculinities in specific localities, but they do change how we  
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19 theorize hegemonic/subaltern masculinities. I argue in this article that migration considerably  
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21 complicates this theoretical context. Ultimately, the performances of masculinity the Kamaiya men  
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23 considered in this article perform, in one sense are both subaltern (in India while working, or trying  
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25 to find work) and hegemonic (in their village). Furthermore, freedom in 2000, has created a space  
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27 within Kamaiya settlements within which hegemonic Kamaiya masculinities are beginning to find  
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29 coherence in the post-bondage era. Ultimately, it is through these interactions that Kamaiya  
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31 masculinities emerge.  
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### 41 **Mobility and Masculinity**

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43 Following the end of the Kamaiya system in 2000, many new opportunities for work and movement  
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45 have emerged for the Kamaiya. During my fieldwork I noticed several new forms of Kamaiya  
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47 mobility that were only possible for Kamaiya men, most of these forms of movement were focused  
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49 on moving to India to a wide range of destinations and for various lengths of time. While such  
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51 movement is new for the Kamaiya, these forms of movement are not new in Nepal, as mobility has  
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53 been a feature of Nepali life for many years (cf. Hausner 2005; Sharma 2007a).  
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These new opportunities for Kamaiya men to move raise several questions. How are Kamaiya men dealing with the growing expectations of them to be mobile? What is their experience of mobility? Do increasing levels of mobility result in their moving from one situation of bondage to another in India or urban areas of Nepal? Through considering the ways in which certain subaltern [within a Nepali or South Asian context] and hegemonic [within Kamaiya settlements] masculinities within the Kamaiya community emerge through mobility, this article offers an original perspective on several longstanding debates about mobility and bonded labour. The literature broadly agrees that bonded labour is linked to migration and mobility (Bremar, Guerin, and Prakash 2009; Bourdieu 1984), however, the nature of this link is disputed. Rogaly et al. (1978) see migration in West Bengal as a means by which bonded labourers can change their situation. Conversely, Bremar (1996b) reports that migrant workers in Gujarat have limited scope for influencing their situation, whether they migrate or not, as migration facilitates new types of bondage. I consider these contested implications of mobility for bonded labor relations, drawing on the life history of a Kamaiya man (Ram) below.

In the Nepali context, mobility is conventionally understood in relation to poverty (Peralta 2007; Donaldson 1991). Research often explicitly focuses on landlessness as a cause of migration, with Bhandari (2004) indicating that those with limited access to land were more likely to migrate. If one follows this argument, one would assume that people with little or no land (such as the Kamaiya) are highly likely to move. However, this was not consistently the case in my research and such a position obscures important aspects of movement in landless and formerly landless communities such as the Kamaiya. The position outlined above (linking land and movement in this way) has not facilitated a consideration of the significance of masculinity in relation to mobility and bonded labour, something this article examines.

More generally, the studies mentioned above do not consider gender or other forms of identity and how these might be important to understanding various forms of mobility. Sharma's (2007a, , 193) research on masculinity and mobility in Nepal indicates that such studies cannot account for the fact that around 90 per cent of those who migrate outside of Nepal are men. He calls for a greater focus on masculinity to complement studies of poverty and land. Sharma's research highlights the importance of masculinity in explaining mobility and what it means for local communities. The importance of masculinity in relation to mobility is reflected in my fieldwork, as I found that only Kamaiya men move, something not explicitly considered in previous research on this or the wider Tharu community (although Sharma (2007a, 2007b, 2008)) does consider this within predominantly high-caste communities in west-central hills in Nepal). However, in Sharma's research, he does not consider or complicate notions of hegemony and subaltern in relation to masculinity, something this article does through considering that these two seemingly contrasting types of masculinity can in fact be the same, but find different meanings in different contexts. This moves the analysis away from an underlying hierarchy when talking about the different masculinities I examine in my research (hegemonic masculinities being contrasting to subaltern masculinities), towards examining the ways in which the same masculinities can mean different things in different places (hegemonic masculinities being the same, or overlapping with subaltern masculinities). Therefore, one cannot consider masculinity within this context without examining the implications of movement and context for gendered identities.

While he does not explicitly talk about masculinity, there is a great deal about the links between masculinity and mobility in Jan Breman's work on migration (Breman 1985, 1990, 1994, 1996a, 2010). Breman suggests that certain types of humiliating bonded (and other) labour led to the

migration of the lower castes (1996a). This is complemented by Kapadia (2002, , 155), who views migration as a response to the arrogance of the upper castes and the humiliation inherent to these labour relations. Such forms of humiliation are gendered in profound ways, for the Kamaiya, related in part to the subversion of the possibility of fulfilling a male breadwinner role.<sup>iii</sup> Rogaly et al (1978) complement this position, finding that men migrate because they are expected to provide for the family. Therefore, movement is the context in which certain subordinate masculinities emerge.

Considering the formative ways in which masculinities are relational (cf. Connell 2009, , 54), mobility leads to further complexity in the ways in which masculinities are constituted. This brings into focus the importance of relationships between men and men, and between men and women in a range of changing locations that are relevant to the Kamaiya communities in which I undertook my research. Opportunities for mobility correspond to both places in the wider geographical horizon (although restricted to Nepal and India for Kamaiya men) and to types of work resulting from higher levels of industrialization in both the Indian and Nepali economies. Mobility also entails exposure to specific configurations of economic and gendered relations. As I discuss below, these processes of mobility to places in which different gendered relations exist complicates Kamaiya masculinities and leads to the emergence of new performances of masculinity.

**Movement from Nepal to India**

While there is varying mobility from and to Nepal, mobility to India is critically important in the Nepali context, particularly in the southern plains (a geological area called the *Terai*). Figures are very unreliable in this instance, partly due to the open border between India and Nepal, compounded by poor data collection. In 2001, 760,000 people had officially migrated out of Nepal, 77 per cent of whom had gone to India (CBS et al. 2002). Sharma contributes an important



gendered analysis of the above figures in which his notion of masculinity adds significantly to the understanding of mobility in Nepal:

The significance of mobility to India lies in the possibility of what it offers to the individual man who moves and the household and how it relates to the experience of other men in the community. (Sharma 2007b, , 3)

This holds true for the village of Kampur, my main field site in Nepal. Shortly after the Kamaiya were officially freed from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour in the year 2000, around two thousand locations across Nepal were chosen as locations for resettlement. Kampur village is one such settlement, and like many others in rural areas the land appropriated for it was previously dense jungle of little economic worth and limited agricultural potential. Kampur comprises 35 houses slightly set back from the east-west highway, with dense forest on three sides. The main east-west highway traverses across the entire length of Nepal's Terai, with the Indian border only around 10-12km away to the south. A rutted mud track that becomes a muddy river during the monsoon rains leads from the road through the village and on into the forest. When the Kamaiya families settled in Kampur, each was allocated a plot of land. More recently (from about 2005) a number of Dalit ('untouchable') and Haliya<sup>iv</sup> households (around 15) have been established at the edges of the village.

The land given to the Kamaiya in Kampur is not very fertile and is insufficient for subsistence, so alongside the food the villagers produce from this land, and rice and lentils purchased with the little income they are able to generate from labouring, the forest is an important resource. Each family has a simple, two-room concrete building with a tin roof on its land. The buildings are poorly

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constructed and the villagers are not happy with them, as they are hot in summer and cold in winter. All the families have built an adjacent traditional mud hut where they cook, eat, drink and socialise. The sides of these huts are covered with mud reliefs, often depicting the forest and hunting.

These economic and social circumstances of marginality are an important context in which to situate changing mobility following the end of the Kamaiya system of bonded labour. From each of the 35 houses at least one family member (always male) had moved to India. Ram was one such man, and there are a number of reasons why I chose him for inclusion in this article, principal among which is that of all the young men I met in Kampur his story is the most complex and nuanced, reflecting the multiple dynamics taking place in the Kamaiya community. His migration to and from India is critical to understanding these complexities. Ram was something of an enigma during my time in the village, which made him very interesting to me, partly due to the fleeting, intermittent nature of his presence in the village as a migrant worker.

**Kamaiya and Bahun masculinities**

Having previously outlined how masculinity is considered theoretically in this article, I now discuss what this means for this research in far-west Nepal. To meaningfully utilize the theory of subordinate/hegemonic masculinity outlined above, it is necessary to establish which masculinities are hegemonic for the Kamaiya men I am considering here (to also examine whether this is both possible and illuminating). To an extent this equates to a focus on Bahun<sup>v</sup>/Brahmanic masculinities, the outline of which provides a context from which to consider aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that are subaltern, and that are performed by men such as Ram emerge as a consequence of the negotiations and interactions between hegemonic and subaltern masculinities. Importantly, the

Brahmanic masculinities I consider here exist predominantly in the locations to which Kamaiya men migrate (India), or when they leave their villages (which due to the resettlement of the Kamaiya after 2000 are almost entirely composed to Kamaiya households).

The theoretical outline previously raises a number of questions. If we accept that there are multiple masculinities, which of the diverse manifestations of masculinity in Nepal and India can be considered hegemonic? To respond to this, I outline here how Brahmanic masculinities in Nepal and South Asia are viewed in the literature to provide a perspective on how such masculinities are considered hegemonic. Osella and Osella have asked the crucial question of whether Brahmanic masculinities can be considered hegemonic in relation to Malayali men in their research in Kerala. In their analysis they initially combine Connell (2005) and Dumont's (1980) positions to reach a perspective indicating that Bahun men and Bahun masculinities (referring to purity *cf.* Dumont) can be considered the hegemonic form (2006, , 6). For Osella and Osella, Brahmanic masculinity is:

...socially high status associated with control, detachment, power and ideologically utterly separated from and unavailable to the feminine. (2006, , 49)

To explore the ways in which subaltern Kamaiya masculinities are configured in relation to Bahun masculinities (as they are defined above by Osella and Osella) I consider various implications of movement for Ram, and the ways he moves to do certain types of manual labour in India. Ram is about 20 years old – neither he nor his family were sure of his exact age. My research assistant and I both thought he looked much older. He has six brothers and sisters, one older sister and the rest younger. He was dismissive of his siblings and had little time for them, despite their obvious affection and reverence. One of his younger brothers told me that this was because he travelled

and was away in India so much. His family were largely unaware of the hardships of Ram's working life in India; he worked as a laborer in various places, mostly in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a state that shares a border with Kailali (the district in Nepal in which my fieldwork was located); hence he was able to return home easily. Despite going to India on a frequent basis he was uniformly critical about it, although he had found certain income-generating opportunities there that he felt were not available to the same extent in Nepal.

Like most young men in the Kampur village, Ram was illiterate. While he was not proud of this, he was assertive about it. Education and the path that a small but growing number of young men in Kampur had chosen had no appeal for Ram. He did not see it as a valid route to making a living or, more importantly, to being a man. For Ram, being a man is closely connected to hard and seemingly unrelenting physically demanding forms of manual labour and the associated income that it generated (cf. Chopra 2004). Bennett adds an additional level of nuance to the perspective on hard physical labour, which is positioned in opposition to Bahun (high caste) notions of work and masculinity:

Any [Bahun] man who can afford to pay someone else to do the heavy farm labour for him. None of Narikot's respected elders, nor indeed any of the younger generation of men who have gone to school, would demean themselves by doing physical labour. (Bennett 2002, , 24)

Therefore, doing hard labour becomes an essential aspect of the performance of subaltern masculinity. In Bennett's research on gender ideologies amongst high-caste Bahun and Chettri communities in Nepal, she highlights a certain strain of Hinduism that focuses on the importance of

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3 purity and asceticism for men, which is integral to the gender ideologies within these communities  
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5 (Bennett 2002, , 126). There is a tension here between this ideology and the imperative of getting  
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7 married and having children (especially sons), which men have to negotiate. Despite the hegemonic  
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9 status of these masculinities, they are also feminized in various contexts, in response to locally-  
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11 defined challenges to their hegemonic position.<sup>(i)(i)(i)(i)vii</sup> Ahearn (2001) likewise explores how  
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13 Magar men who divert from the normative path to adult male status (which involves joining the  
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15 army in her research) and focus on education tend to be feminized. The process of feminization  
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17 likens men to high-caste men, who are viewed along the following lines:  
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24 ...studious [Magar] boys were likened to high-caste Bahun and Chettri boys, who despite  
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26 their higher ritual (and often economic) status, were seen as weaklings. (Ahearn 2001, , 70)  
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31 We see here how certain masculinities are configured in relation to Bahun (and Chettri)  
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33 masculinities and how, in this instance, this configuration results in the feminization of Bahun and  
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35 Chettri boys. Importantly, as Ahearn states, this does not actually change the higher status of the  
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37 Bahun boys but is more a reflection of Magar boys negotiating these hegemonic forms.  
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43 Ram felt challenged by the increasing levels of education in the village and educated men (including  
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45 me) who did little hard labor.<sup>viii</sup> He did not seem to understand the point of education, which was  
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47 not common in the village; it was not what Kamaiya men do to make a living. Being more literate  
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49 had nothing to do with the Kamaiya being freed. These emergent and alternative masculinities are  
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51 neither subaltern nor hegemonic, with their relative status varying significantly due in part to the  
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53 ways in which men such as Ram contested these manifestations of masculinity. Ram very much  
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55 contested the notion that education was a valid route to conferring male status, for him this was  
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only possible through physical labor. Many of those who had kept the Kamaiya in situations of bondedness were highly educated and despite working all the days and hours they could, many Kamaiya remained extremely poor. Conversely, according to Ram, many Bahun were lazy but still rich. He was skeptical, too, of office-related work, of which politicians are seen as the most obvious example, and there was widespread disdain for politicians, irrespective of political allegiance. Ram's views were reminiscent of the perceptions of some of the older men in the village about the expectations of work and associated masculinities. Here we can see Ram performing a type of subaltern masculinity that is positioned in opposition to less physically demanding masculinities (such as Bahun masculinities). From this subaltern position he is able to generate a sense of pride and confidence as a man despite this being low paid and low status work (cf. McDuié-Ra, 2011).

The younger and more economically active generation adhered closely to the most highly valued ways of being a man (such as consuming in certain ways), which were evolving further away from the sorts of masculinities predominant within the Kamaiya system. While it was not very straightforward to get an overly clear account of this time from many of my respondents, after some time I was able to get a sense of life within the Kamaiya system and the ways that Kamaiya men were expected to behave as bonded labourers. For example, 'older' Kamaiya masculinities within and defined by the Kamaiya system as they were described to me as being obedient and submissive, hardworking and often unquestioning of the system of bondage in which they found themselves. Throughout this paper I have used the word Kamaiya to refer to both a system of bonded labour and the bonded labourers in it, reflecting both the academic and popular discourses about the system and the people in it. The word more accurately describes adult male bonded labourers, with different and rigid roles at different stages in Kamaiya men's lives given different names, as is also the case for Kamaiya women. Therefore, Kamaiya men are the unmarked gender

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3 in discussions of the Kamaiya system, as it is the normative way of discussing all Kamaiya, men and  
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5 women, young and old in Nepali and the Dangaura Tharu languages.  
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10 It was not as simple to life within the Kamaiya system with older Kamaiya men for a number of  
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12 reasons.<sup>ix</sup> Conversely a number of younger Kamaiya men (approximately under 30) were on  
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14 occasion quite keen to talk about how their fathers and in some instances they, had been expected  
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16 to behave submissively while they had been bonded-laborers. These recollections sometimes took  
17  
18 quite confrontational tones, with these sentiments finding wider expression in the movement that  
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20 lead to the freedom of the Kamaiya in 2000 (cf. Cheria 2005; Karki 2001; Maycock 2012). Despite  
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22 having been freed in 2000, one could still see various manifestations of masculinities within the  
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24 Kamaiya system within Kamaiya masculinities of post-bondage era. This was particularly so for  
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26 older Kamaiya men, who had spent a significant proportion of their lives within the Kamaiya  
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28 system. Ultimately, this seemed to affect and reduce their standing as men within settlements such  
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30 as Kampur.  
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38 Knowing Ram's family background is important, as it helps to contextualize his mobility. As the  
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40 eldest son, there were certain expectations of him regarding providing for and leadership in the  
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42 household which he seemed to find difficult to meet. His mother had given him a small amount of  
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44 money for him to move to India with in the first instance (around 2005, in the winter), and she had  
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46 encouraged him to go there. From his family's perspective, Ram moving to India might have been a  
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48 diversification strategy like that of other men focusing on education. A similar impetus behind  
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50 mobility has been explored in other contexts (cf. Herzfeld 1985), and this might help to explain why  
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52 his mother was so keen that Ram go to India.  
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On several occasions I had the impression that being away from his family, particularly his mother, was also an important reason behind Ram’s moving to work in India. This does not mean that he did not fulfill some of the expectations to provide materially for his family. Ram provides an interesting example of a man adapting to this mobile, migrant way of life and of how this in turn has become an important part of his masculinity. Most Kamaiya men have no experience or wider history of mobility, making such movement difficult and potentially dangerous. Both Weiner (1978) and Sharma (2007a, , Chapter 6) convincingly illustrate the importance of knowing someone at the destination point who can help to find work, show one around and provide an entry into the social networks associated with certain diasporas which in some ways recreate the social worlds of home. Marius-Gnanou also makes this point in relation to seasonal migration in Tamil Nadu:

Without social networks, migrants are more vulnerable to intimidation or non-payment of wages, and are unable to get out of debt or overcome a crisis. (Marius-Gnanou 2008, , 133)

Ram’s experience provides an insight into the wider experiences of Kamaiya men who often move without an established social network relating to mobility. Ram told me that he always moved alone, and while he often met other Nepalis while travelling, he had never met another Kamaiya on his journeys. He appeared not to want to, though the isolation and vulnerability that this led to was sometimes difficult. This refers to what Breman identifies as part of the motivation for Dalit men from Gujarat to move:



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3 Their motivation for migrating is the anonymity which accompanies them in the  
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5 outside world... they are not immediately identified and stigmatized [as Dalit].  
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8 (Breman 1996a, , 238).  
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12 Therefore, mobility relates not simply to improved material considerations, which in some  
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14 instances may be negligible anyway, but also to the range of ways of being (a man) that mobility  
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16 facilitates. While mobility was not a wholly positive experience for Ram, there were benefits.  
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18 Insightfully, he told me that when he was in India he was neither a Kamaiya nor even a Tharu<sup>x</sup>: he  
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20 was simply a poor Nepali like the many other Nepali men in India searching for work. Ram seemed  
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22 to be constantly striving to transcend the village and to become associated with other parts of  
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24 India, as he felt this gave him more freedom. While I was in Kampur, Ram was rarely in the village.  
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26 This enabled him to give the impression that in this way he was different from most men in  
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28 Kampur, despite doing similar work to most of them. This suggests that the location, and not the  
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30 type of employment that Ram was engaged in and aspired to, is central to the image he wanted to  
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32 present of a man different to the other inhabitants of the village. Furthermore, this consolidates  
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34 the notion that Ram is performing the same masculinities, although when he is in India these are  
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36 subaltern, conversely, when he is back in his village they take a more hegemonic form.  
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46 There is some irony in the fact that while many Kamaiya men such as Ram have lived close to the  
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48 Indian border, they (and a small number of women) have only been able to cross the border since  
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50 the abolishment of the Kamaiya system. The Indian border is only around 12 km from Kampur  
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52 village, making it very easy to go to India and back in a day. This created a different sense of being  
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54 'away' and being 'at home' for Ram. On average he stayed away for three or four months at a time.  
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56 Breman (1996a, , 53) calls such mobility 'circulation', to describe the brief nature of these  
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movements, the lack of consistency in the location of mobility and the type of work undertaken. One significant and positive implication of this type of circulatory migration relates to Ram's inheritance. This type of movement did not seem to put his inheritance into question and in fact strengthened his position, as it was assumed that when he did inherit the families land, financially he would be in a stronger position as a consequence of moving to India. This would then allow him to improve the land his family had, as well as potentially to buy more.

I had the impression that Ram would rather not return to Kampur, although he told me that things might change when he got a wife. He was unmarried and had no girlfriend; he appeared to have little interest in such matters. He assumed that when he had made enough money he would come back to the village with some savings, and his family would arrange a marriage for him. As he was at the upper end of the average age range at which men get married there were growing expectations that he would be married soon.

Having discussed how mobility provides a means by which Ram has been able to construct a different masculine identity to those that tended to predominate both previously within the Kamaiya system and presently back in Kampur, I now consider his experiences of mobility as he recounted them to me.

**The Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs of Movement**

Ram engaged in a broad range of unskilled labouring work in India. He essentially did whatever work was available, most of the time working as a road cutter. This required very long hours of physically demanding labour. He had no protective clothing, and his chronic cough was the result of all the smoke and tar he had inhaled while working on road-building projects over the years. His

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3 appearance seemed infused with the dust of his work, even though the dust itself had long gone.  
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5 The work drained him completely; his mother told me that when he came home he often said very  
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7 little for days, as he was so exhausted. Breman's (1996) research in Gujarat found that migrant  
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9 workers had limited scope to influence their situation whether they migrated or not: migration can  
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11 create new types of bondage. This was apparent in Ram's experience: he had very few options in  
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13 relation to what sort of work he did. He was one of many other men (and women) moving around  
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15 India in search of work and providing a pool of cheap, disposable labour for various employers.  
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22 Ram took an evident pride in his work-related endeavors and in the fact that he rarely took time  
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24 off, as he would not be paid if he did. He was proud to work as hard as he did, but there were  
25  
26 negative consequences. When he returned to the village, he was distant and almost vacant until he  
27  
28 readjusted to being back and recovered from his recent period of work. He was there when I first  
29  
30 went to the village but he left soon afterwards, so I was initially not able to spend much time with  
31  
32 him. I saw him about three months later when he returned and over the week or so before he left  
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34 again to work in India and then six months after that before I left Kampur in December 2009. There  
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36 was a kind of mental and physical emptiness for a few days on the occasions he returned from  
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38 India.  
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46 In one sense mobility can facilitate meeting expectations associated with 'breadwinner'  
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48 masculinities in Kamaiya communities. This has been explored elsewhere, with migration making an  
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50 important contribution to men's ability to maintain their gendered, breadwinner roles (cf. West  
51  
52 2001). Although this may not be the case for all men who migrate:  
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3 Migration to Delhi challenges tribal masculinity. It moves tribal men away from the  
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5 environment where their masculinity is produced and also gives tribal women new  
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7 opportunities for independence and mobility. (McDuie-Ra 2011, , 8).  
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12 The critical difference here is that McDuie-Ra studied men and women migrating together. As a  
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14 consequence remittances were less important, resulting in a greater disconnect from the places  
15  
16 that these men and women migrated from. In my (and Sharma's (2007a; 2007b)) research only  
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18 men migrate, thus links to home are more important and sending money back is a way of proving  
19  
20 one's success as a man who has migrated. Like many men I met during my research, Ram's future  
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22 plans revolved around seeking better-paid and consistent work simply in order to make more  
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24 money. While I was in Kampur he was not able to send much back to his family by way of  
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26 remittances due to his very low wages.xi Consequently this gave him a relatively low standing in  
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28 the village. Ram seemed to feel it necessary to come back if only to keep up the impression that he  
29  
30 was supporting his family – not just financially, but also emotionally and in relation to security. The  
31  
32 appeal of mobility for Ram is broader than the fact that it enables him to provide economically for  
33  
34 his family as he was not very successful in this: for him it was partly to do with the way that mobility  
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36 in and of itself is becoming an important marker of adult Kamaiya masculinities. So for some men  
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38 moving is becoming part of proving one's masculinity as a Kamaiya man.  
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48 Srivastava (1984) reports that migrants often receive both delayed payment and extremely low  
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50 wages, raising the question of why people migrate if it brings such hardship. Ram told me how  
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52 various factory and road construction company owners had cheated him throughout his time  
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54 working in India, not paying him properly and treating with disdain and sometimes violence. As  
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56 these owners are often closely linked to various branches of the Indian government (including the  
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3 police), Ram had no recourse to justice and was forced to leave in some cases without any pay, due  
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5 to both the threat and the reality of violence from the police and private security staff. There were  
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7 many more powerful men than him in these settings, with Ram at the lower ends of multiple forms  
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9 of stratification. These experiences compromised and challenged his personal security and his  
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11 sense of masculinity, which was becoming increasingly reliant on his experience of mobility. Despite  
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13 these challenges and being confronted by various forms of violence combined with alternative  
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15 masculinities that he had not encountered previously, he remained committed to his status and  
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17 position as a man who moved. The village presented less obvious threats, and although his low  
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19 income subverted his status there, being such a man was an aspect of his masculinity that he was  
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21 able to successfully affirm there.  
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29 For Ram and others, notions of success in relation to mobility reflect the idea of competency in  
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31 masculine practices and help to explain certain masculine behaviors (cf. Connell 2009, , 58). It is not  
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33 enough to simply move; it is also important to be considered 'successful' as a consequence of  
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35 moving, particularly back at home. Ram showed no obvious or material signs of success, perhaps  
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37 because he had had little success in his working life in India; and consequently disposable income  
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39 was in short supply for both him and his family. Similar to many of the people I spoke to who had  
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41 moved to India, he felt significant pressure to send as much money home as possible. The more  
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43 money sent back to the village the more successful the sender was seen to be, resulting in good  
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45 standing relative to other men. How the money was made did not seem to matter. This helps to  
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47 explain the disconnection between the often harsh, sometimes brutal working conditions  
48  
49 experienced, and perceptions of these conditions amongst the men's families back in Kampur. Ram  
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51 moved not just for economic reasons but also to fulfill the expectations of his family as the eldest  
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53 son in a context of limited economic opportunities. This also helps to explain the emergence of new  
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hegemonic forms of masculinity within Kamaiya settlements that are dependent on mobility. We have seen that these masculinities can be considered subaltern when abroad in India, but back at home in places like Kampur these emergent masculinities take more hegemonic forms. Here hegemonic means desirable, or sought after which helps to explain why men such as Ram still want to migrate, despite the hardships that this is equated with while in India.

The work he did was difficult and earned him little status either in the village or in India. His relatively low wages limited his potential to consume in ways that would accord him status. He had bought some clothes in India of which he was proud: while he was not able to consume in the same ways as some of the other young men in Kampur, what he was able to buy had a certain status as it came from India. Being able to consume in these ways was important part for Ram and the way he was trying to portray the appearance of successful masculinity, despite the many barriers (such as his low income) that made this difficult. Consumption in this way with commodities from India, make an important contribution to hegemonic mobile masculinities Ram performed within Kampur.

In sum, Ram's work in India has led to a new type of masculinity that depends on various aspects of mobility to create an image of success. Ram's performance of masculinity can alternatively be viewed as subaltern while in India, and hegemonic (or in many ways desirable) when he is back in Kampur. We have seen that mobility represents both a range of opportunity (and not solely economic ones) and constraint, particularly in relation to his experience of exploitation and violence associated with the types and locations of his work in India. This section has shown that mobility is leading to types of masculinity in Kamaiya communities that were unthinkable prior to the abolition of the Kamaiya system. Ultimately, changing patterns of mobility have contributed to

the emergence of new Kamaiya masculinities, which complicate the ways in which we consider ideas of 'subaltern' and 'hegemonic' masculinities.

## Conclusion

Following freedom from bondage a greater diversity of Kamaiya masculinities are emerging (Maycock, 2012), in conjunction with a greater diversity of ways in which Kamaiya men can be considered successful. Although here I focused on the man who moves, there are other 'non-mobile' standards of success that are specific to the post-bondage era. For example, some Kamaiya men are getting an education that would not have been possible under bondage. Similarly, a number of Kamaiya men are working for NGOs INGOs (that tend to focus on the Kamaya community). As was noted in more detail previously, under bondage, being a successful man meant being obedient and hardworking, and many of the expectations were the opposite to those that Kamaiya men are dealing with now. While the Kamaiya system was largely based on exploitation, within it the men had clearly-defined roles and associated expectations. Now things are far more complicated and in some ways more difficult for these men. However, the formative links between masculinity and hard work, while changing, have remained constant. As I have shown, Kamaiya masculinities are becoming more complicated and diverse following freedom. Osella and Osella find that:

Male identities are continually negotiated between various positions as men pick their way through competing demands and maintain precarious balances. (2000, , 118)

If changing patterns of movement, work and literacy are creating the potential for the emergence of new Kamaiya masculinities, Osella and Osella's (ibid) 'negotiation' also becomes more difficult. As a consequence of freedom new Kamaiya masculinities are emerging and within this context I have show that movement is a critical and formative consideration, particularly for younger Kamaiya men. In this context of new forms of mobility, Kamaiya men experience and perform alternatively subaltern and hegemonic masculinities. Through their new found mobility, they enter into engagements with a broader South Asian context in which they emulate prefigured patterns of masculine labor mobility and also find themselves subject to and subaltern within configurations of hierarchical (Kamaiya and Bahun) masculinities. At the same time, these new forms of Kamaiya mobility create new hierarchies of masculinity in local, rural Kamaiya communities, in which young, migrant men themselves are obtaining hegemonic status as role models for an emergent, desirable, and mobile masculinity. With regard to broader, theoretical understandings of masculinity, the ethnographic evidence outlined in this article illustrates the contextual conditions of "hegemony" – subordinate masculinities in one context can be hegemonic in another. Therefore, to label certain performances of masculinity as hegemonic or subaltern becomes problematic. As the example of Ram indicates, it is more necessary to examine the workings of subordination and hegemony [or the workings of power] within specific contexts. These are contexts, which for Kamaiya [and many other] men are becoming increasingly complex and multiple.

I have shown that Kamaiya mobility is strongly gendered and has a profound influence on the performance of masculinities by men such as Ram. As well as representing certain opportunities, movement has brought with it a new set of challenges and subversions that Kamaiya men have not experienced previously. Furthermore, movement has been shown to be a varied process that both facilitates and complicates the emergence of certain masculinities. This article has illustrated that



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3 the same performance of masculinity means very different things due to the sort of movement that  
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5 Ram engaged in, so while in his village this can be viewed as hegemonic, conversely, while abroad  
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7 in India this takes a more subaltern form. So the performances of masculinity I have explored in this  
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9 article are subaltern (in a South Asian context) and hegemonic (in Kamaiya settlements) as they are  
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11 considered desirable or preferred. In settlements such as Kampur, Kamaiya men *want* to be mobile  
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13 labourers despite the multiple negative dimensions of this when abroad. Ultimately, for low caste  
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15 and class men such as Ram, new opportunities to move are both exciting and at times dangerous,  
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17 both liberating and restrictive. Movement facilitates the emergence of both subaltern and  
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19 hegemonic masculinities in new and old places for men such as Ram.  
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Notes

<sup>i</sup> The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Nepal throughout 2009 complemented by short field visits in 2011 and 2012. The fieldwork was undertaken principally in a Kamaiya village in Kailali District in far-west Nepal. Methodologically it is based on a multi-method approach (principally utilising participant observation, life histories and focus groups) within an ethnographic framework.

<sup>ii</sup> As Osella and Osella (2006) also report from Kerala.

<sup>iii</sup> Osella and Osella (2006) indicate that the ‘breadwinner’ ideal has become the predominant mode of masculinity in their research in South India.

<sup>iv</sup> The Haliya are another group of bonded labourers.

<sup>v</sup> Bahun is the Nepali colloquial term for Brahmin.

<sup>vi</sup> Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the most obvious example of such a configuration of masculinity (Alter, 1994, 2000).

<sup>vii</sup> Nandy (1983, 10) indicates that the feminisation of Bahun men has not historically always worked along these lines, at times quite the opposite being the case: “The Bahun in his cerebral, self-denying asceticism was the traditional masculine counterpoint to the more violent, ‘virile’ active *Ksatriya* (writer or scribe caste), the later representing, the feminine principal in the cosmos.”

<sup>viii</sup> Here I am referring to formal education in school settings. Over the three years I have been visiting Kampur, changes have been taking place in the levels of education in the village, with increasing numbers of Kamaiya children receiving a basic education (although in 2012 no one had yet passed their School Leaving Certificate (SLC)). Literacy and education delivered in school settings were largely not available to most Kamaiya in the Kamaiya system, so this represents an important change in the Kamaiya community following freedom. The implications of changes in

literacy and educational level for subaltern Kamaiya masculinities will form the focus of a subsequent article.

<sup>ix</sup> For example, these reasons include, that older men were less accessible as research subjects, and found talking about such issues quite difficult particularly as it was almost impossible to find a space in Kampur in which a research subject might be able to discuss sensitive issues in privacy with me.

<sup>x</sup> The Tharu are the wider ethnic from which the Kamaiya originate.

<sup>xi</sup> For more on gender differences relating to remittances see Orozco, Lowell and Schneider (2006) and Carling (2008).



Figure 1 – Location of Kailali and Ecological Zones of Nepal, source

<http://reliefweb.int>